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ABSTRACT

Providing a systematic investigation of the dimensional nature of relationships, this paper focuses primarily upon the control dimension of interpersonal relationships. After establishing a conceptual foundation of the control dimension, the paper next enumerates the verbal and nonverbal indicants of control in regard to their manipulative functions. Finally, it reviews various attempts at measurement and considers the development of more accurate and precise measurements. (FL)

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THE CONTROL DIMENSION OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: CONCEPTUALIZATION, BEHAVIORAL CORRELATES AND MEASUREMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper was a systematic investigation of the dimensional nature of relationships with specific focus upon the control dimension. The conceptual foundation of control was presented and discussed. Verbal and nonverbal indicants of control were ennumerated and discussed in regard to their manipulative functions. Finally, attempts at measurement were reviewed with recommendations for the development of more accurate and precise measurements.

The Control Dimension of Interpersonal Relationships

The phenomenon of interpersonal relationships has been the subject of much systematic investigation within the field of speech communication. This research has demonstrated that interpersonal relationships are multi-dimensional in nature. It has been suggested that this concept is comprised of a control dimension (Schutz, 1958; Giffin & Patton, 1976; Rogers & Farace, 1975), an affect dimension (Schutz, 1958; Brown, 1965; Wheeless, 1977), and possibly an anxiety dimension (Wheeless & Andersen, forthcoming). This paper will focus on the control dimension of interpersonal relationships.

In an attempt to provide a systematic investigation of interpersonal control, this paper will focus on three topic areas. Initially, we will establish a conceptual foundation of tbe control dimension. Secondly, we will enumerate the communication behaviors associated with that dimension. Finally, attempts at measurement will be reviewed with consideration for the development of more accurate and precise measurements.

Review of the Literature

Control has been approached from many different perspectives: dominance-submission (Leary, 1957; Lorr & McNair, 1966; Giffin & Patton, 1976), inhibition-exhibition (Lorr & McNair, 1966), and superiority-inferiority (Bochner, et. al., 1977). Research has generated several descriptive terms for what is essentially the control dimension: status (Brown, 1965), assertiveness (Borgatta, 1960; Becker & Krug, 1964; Lashbrook, Knutson, Parsley & Wenburg, 1976), and aggressiveness (Lorr & McNair, 1966; Knapp, 1978). Schutz (1958) suggests possible terms connoting a positive control relationship: power, authority, dominance, influence, rules, superior officer, and leader. Furthermore, Schutz (1958) described the

negative aspect of control in a relationship in terms of rebellion, resistance, follower, anarchy, submissive, and henpecked. Lashbrook, et al (1976) have investigated the dimensions of relational behaviors and have found a dimension relating to control which they have termed "assertiveness." Perceived assertiveness was defined as "...what others think of a person in terms of his or her tendency to state opinions with assurance, confidence, and force" (p. 2). Closely related to the notion of assertiveness is the dominant communicator suggested by Norton.

Perhaps the most encompassing notion within the control dimension is the communicator style construct. Communicator style has been defined by Norton (1978) as "...the way one verbally or paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (p. 99). This construct has been operationally defined as consisting of nine independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables were "dominant, dramatic, contentions, animated, impression leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, and friendly" (p. 99). The dependent variable, communicator image, was operationalized by the statement, "I am a good communicator" (p. 99). Of specific concern to this paper was the communicator style that elicits a classification of dominance. Norton (1978) suggested that the dominant interactant takes charge of social situations. He discovered that dominant and contentions clustered together and suggested that they comprised one end of a continuum with attentive and friendly comprising the other end. Further, Norton (1978) contended that the dominant/contentions communicator style represented a directive communicative activity. Dominant was also found to be one of three (impression leaving and open being the other two) strong predictors of the dependent variable communicator image. Therefore, through the use of variable research Norton (1978) is attempting to isolate those variables known to impact

meaning, and in this manner identify the components of a good communicator. It is significant to note that a dominant communicator style was found to be one of the best predictors of a good communicator image.

Brown (1965) pursued the concept of status and suggested that it encompassed control. Brown (1965) states that status differences are marked by differences in valued characteristics such as age, sex, occupation, income, etc. Brown concludes that there are some nonverbal indicants of status such as spatial proxemic relations marked by being above or below, in front or behind. Status differences are also marked by agreeable sentiments of superiority and by disagreeable sentiments of inferiority. Brown (1965) states behavioral characteristics of status differences marked by influence, control, power, etc. Symbols of status differentiation are marked by any perceptible differences in valued characteristics such as "superior" and "inferior" spatial positions or influence and control.

In addition, Brown (1965) states that many societies value seniority, maleness, noble lineage, higher education, a large income, and positions of formal authority. A status order derives from individual differences with respect to the possession of such characteristics. Brown (1965) also states that there must be agreement about the characteristics to be valued and their degree of value.

Finally, Collins & Guetzkow (1964) suggested that high status people may control others with little effort. They indicate that high status persons in a relationship have the ability to influence others without overt attempts to influence. They also initiate more attempts to influence and are more successful at it than low-status persons, and are more resistant to the other person's attempts at influence.

Control has also been defined in terms of dominance. Dominance in an

interaction was referred to by Rogers and Farace (1975) as the control aspect in a message exchange. This notion of dominance or control is contained in the broader category of relational communication. "The theoretic concepts of symmetry, transitory, and complementarity reflect basic types of control, and are defined in terms of the similarities or differences in control maneuvers appearing in an interaction" (Rogers & Farace, 1975, p. 222). Two examples by Rogers and Farace (1975) would be to consider oneself as being either one-up, one-down, or one-across in a particular transaction.

According to Leary (1957), the purpose of interpersonal behavior is to induce from the other person behavior that is complementary to one's own behavior. He suggests that we train others to respond to us in ways that prompt desired behaviors. Thus, complementarity occurs when a person engages in dominant behaviors to elicit submissive ones, or vice versa. Leary (1957) also suggests that the affect dimension works in a like manner: hate induces hate, and love induces love. Furthermore, Miller & Steinberg (1975) suggested that communication reflects an attempt to influence another's behavior to elicit physical, social, and economic rewards.

Pursuing the relational manifestations of control further, Hull (1943) provides a systems perspective to this dimension. Hull (1943) characterized the human organism as a dynamic system in which behavior is controlled by internal and external environmental demands for self-maintenance or gratification. This underlying principle of self-preservation would argue that a person is always waging a battle for control of his or her environment (including other people) even though he or she is not consciously aware of it. This would seem to indicate that although attempts at control may not be conscious, they are nonetheless control behaviors because of the very nature of the human organism--to adapt to and control its environment. The issue here relates to

a basic problem in defining communication. The Miller & Steinberg (1975) definition mentioned above implies intent on the part of the source to control the receiver in some way. McCroskey & Wheeless (1976) argue that communication can be unintentional. From a relational viewpoint the question of intent is not as important as the way control functions or is perceived within the relationship. As long as the message functions and/or is perceived to be a control mechanism by one or both of the members in the dyad, it does not matter how the message was intended by the source.

If one views communication itself as a control mechanism then all messages are control oriented. Morton, Alexander & Altman (1976) suggested that an essential feature of any relationship is mutuality or consensus about the roles in the relationship. This would suggest the pervasiveness of control as a determining factor in interpersonal relationships. In a similar vein, Bochner, Kaminski & Fitzpatrick (1977) concluded that the control dimension appeared as the first factor and accounted for the most variance in both perceptions of self, and perceptions of best-liked others. This would lead to the conclusion that affect or any other dimension of interpersonal relationships, although important, should be subsumed under the control domain. Certainly this notion is not foreign to females who have been promised love in exchange for a "romantic interlude."

Although we make a strong case for viewing the control dimension as a super-dimension, we do not intend to exclude the study of affect or any other construct as a separate dimension. We simply see the expression of affect as another means of gratification within the self-preserving human organism. Therefore we conclude that relational control can best be conceptualized as the degree to which the relationship is perceived by persons in the relationship to reflect both differential and intense potential/actual contingencies of rewards and punishments.

BEHAVIORAL CORRELATES

Still another orientation that has been utilized by researchers is the isolation of behaviors associated with the control dimension. Various behaviors that have been associated with control are: influencing others (Brown, 1965; Morton, et al, 1976), manipulating others (Bochner, et al, 1977), and possessiveness (Schutz, 1958). These behaviors can be dichotomized into verbal and nonverbal control-related categories.

Verbal Behaviors

Initially, we would suggest that verbal control behaviors are those that orally manipulate both potential and/or actual contingencies of rewards and punishments. Investigation into the verbal domain of control has yielded a variety of behaviors: imposing opinions on others (Buchholz, Lashbrook & Wenburg, 1977); threatening others (Gibb, 1961); humiliating others (Bochner, et al, 1977); taking charge of meetings (Buchholz, et al, 1975); and changing the topic (Mark, 1970; Rogers & Farace, 1975).

Miller & Steinberg (1975) suggested that people have an individualized set of personal control messages, a unique way of transmitting these, and a personal way of responding to what is communicated to them. The authors label this as the individual's "pattern of communication control" (PCC). Miller and Steinberg (1975) have grouped these behaviors and developed a typology of control behaviors. They have concluded that there are five patterns of communication control. The first is the dangling carrot, a reward technique. This strategy requires that person A attempts to change the rate and/or direction of person B's behavior by showing the latter the reward for his or her behavior. The second pattern is termed the hanging sword, a punishment strategy. Person A creates or threatens to create some undesirable state for

person B. Person B, therefore, confirms his or her behavior to avoid the discomfort threatened by person A. The third strategy is the catalyst technique in which person A manages person B's behavior by convincing him or her that they are acting in their own best interest. The fourth PCC is the siamese twin strategy. Both person A and B are mutually dependent upon each other and both have relatively equal power. Person A can control person B if he or she realizes the magnitude of the other's dependence. The final PCC is the fairyland strategy which "relies on self-induced feelings of control" (Miller & Steinberg, 1975, p. 177). This strategy distorts reality by ignoring undesireable responses or by assigning positive implications to undesireable responses.

Other researchers have taken different perspectives as to the typology of the control dimension. Knapp (1978) has classified control behaviors into aggressive-evasive patterns of interaction. Aggressiveness can be divisive and provoke an individual to physical violence. There are many manifestations of evasion in interactions: (1) the process of changing the focus of responsibility away from oneself and onto another or others, (2) the process of changing the direction of the conversations by either not answering, managing the question, or managing the questioner, (3) the process of changing the level of conversation by treating a serious response light-heartedly, and (4) the process of sending inconsistent messages and putting people in double binds. Wiener and Mehrabian (1968) have reduced control-related behaviors further, and suggested that control (via status) can be indicated by formal titles of address.

Status differences are also reflected in subtle aspects of speech such as formal titles of address (Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Mehrabian (1972) provides an example of this communication behavior with a doctor of medicine; one would

say, "Dr. French" but never "Mr. French". Brown (1965) noted the use of formal titles and utilized them to indicate status differentials in relationships.

As the researchers have demonstrated, one's focus of investigation or unit of analysis can have a profound effect upon the behaviors thought to indicate control. As discussed earlier, Norton (1978) relied upon the individual as the unit of analysis. Knapp (1978), however, looked to the dyad to investigate control behaviors associated with initiation and deterioration of a relationship. Knapp (1978) discussed the process of termination of relationships. He suggested that a relationship can deteriorate before it starts; one person does not return the normal approaching features of the greeting ritual. Often people may move directly to the avoiding or terminating stage following a greeting ritual. Knapp (1978) contends that there is a unique pattern of communication associated with deteriorating dyads. As relationships decay, the dyad seems to design messages in such a way that interaction patterns gradually take on "stranger" characteristics. Individuals within the dyad control the relationship by means of an increase in physical and psychological distance and an increase in disassociation with the other person.

Finally, turning to the small group research one discovers that control behaviors are often used to establish and maintain symmetry in a relationship. Ellis (1977) found a prominent cycle of interaction behaviors in small groups assigned to a task. The pattern starts with the introduction of new information (↑-) which is most likely to be followed by support or extension prompting a high degree of equivalent symmetry (→→). When the equivalent symmetry is finally interrupted, the most probable transition is back to new information. Ellis (1977) also studied consciousness-raising groups and found that consistent with the constraints established for such groups, there were more attempts to avoid differences, conflict and judgmental statements. Equivalent symmetry was

by far the most prominent mode of relational interaction. This suggests that control behaviors do not necessarily have to convey a negative connotation. Ellis (1977) demonstrated that behaviors utilized for the purpose of controlling another can serve to stablize or balance a relationship. Ellis' (1977) study deals with content-free observations or classifications and raises an important problem inherent in communication research.

It is difficult and undesirable to separate the verbal messages from their nonverbal correlates. Mehrabian (1971) demonstrated the importance of nonverbal behaviors as a means of distinguishing control-related communication behaviors. Distance may be communicated by the communication content, or as Mehrabian (1971) suggests, by nonimmediacy. Through nonverbal behaviors one can communicate distance: less direct body orientation, less eye contact, eye contact for shorter durations, less haptic behavior, a cold vocalic tone, and fewer mutual pauses in speaking. Disassociation is reflected in an increasing concern for oneself, and a decreasing concern for the relationship. Experiences are no longer shared together, differences in dress are emphasized, and changes in attitudes and values become apparent.

Intuitively, verbal behaviors cannot be viewed in isolation from their nonverbal correlates. Therefore, the following section will present some nonverbal behaviors associated with the control dimension of interpersonal relationships.

Nonverbal Behaviors

If one does dicotomize verbal and nonverbal behaviors that communicate control, it is quite possible that he/she will find a larger number of nonverbal cues than verbal correlates. Numerous researchers have identified various nonverbal behaviors as indicating control in a relationship. Nonverbal

communication of control is primarily a function of dominance and status. Therefore, those behaviors reflecting dominance and status from another and do not require oral utterances were classified as nonverbal correlates of control.

Rogers and Jones (1975) provided an investigation into nonverbal control behaviors. Specifically, the researchers examined floor holding behaviors in dyadic interactions. Rogers and Jones (1975) found that the more dominant members in a dyad held the floor almost twice as long as their dyadic partner. The more dominant member also had much more success in interaction interruption, although this behavior did not satisfy the statistical significance level established by the researchers. Rogers and Jones (1975) claimed that their results could be generalized beyond competitive tasks to cooperative tasks as well.

Further research by Morris (1977) identified several other nonverbal behaviors related to dominence including standing while others sit, gazing down at others, appearing to be busy, and holding one's head high with an erect posture. Brown (1965) further established the significance of nonverbal behavior. He noted that various status symbols (formal dress, larger office space, briefcases, private secretaries, etc.) are indicants of control. Mehrabian (1971) elaborates that persons of higher status determine the degree of immediacy permitted in their interactions with others. For instance, a person of lower status must rely on gestures of invitation from the higher status person before entering his/her office. Such an opportunity also places a heavy obligation on the lower status person to accept the invitation of higher status persons or suffer the consequences in employment, social standing, etc. Mehrabian (1971) further notes that body relaxation is an important indicator of status. Conversely, increased tension occurs when a person addresses

someone of higher status. Status differentials between two people can be identified by investigating spatial interactions.

Status is associated with greater space or distance. Generally those with higher status have more and better space and greater freedom to move about (Hall, 1959; Knapp, 1972). Burns (1964) reported an experiment in which subjects consistantly identified a man's status according to spatial relationships. Mehrabian (1969) cited two studies which suggested "that the distance between two communicators is positively correlated with their status discrepancy." Mehrabian (1971) added that a person of higher status has the right (through mutual consent) to increase his/her immediacy with another. Therefore, Mehrabian (1971) maintains that when two strangers interact, the more relaxed and immediate of the two will probably be accepted as having higher status than the other.

Turning to the nonverbal area of kinesics, several different behaviors have been found to indicate status in a transaction. Mehrabian (1969) provided us with some information concerning the role of status in kinesic communication. In standing positions, shoulder orientations were found to be more direct with a high status person. The author also noted that his subjects would raise their heads more when speaking to a high status person. Observational evidence seems to confirm that those assuming inferior roles, more often lower their heads while those assuming superior roles more frequently keep their heads raised. Finally, Goffman (1961) noted that high status individuals (psychiatrists) sat in relaxed postures, putting their feet on the table, and lying slumped in their seats. Lower status people sat more formally, straight in their chairs.

Mehrabian (1971) also studied the oculesic behaviors associated with status. He reported that when a lower status person initiates a conversation, the higher

status one is not required by social norms to be overly responsive, or to establish eye contact with him/her. He/she can legitimately turn to one side and seem to be listening without showing much reaction to what he hears. This suggests basically that the higher status individual has all of the nonverbal options, whether it is the manipulation of physical distance or the management of eye contact to communicate relational control. However, it is the position of this paper that the verbal and nonverbal behaviors should be investigated in relation to one another.

MEASUREMENT

Although control as a dimension of communication has been the subject of a substantial amount of research, the development of a measurement that encompasses the singular domain of control has been virtually ignored. Researchers have developed instruments tapping portions of the control domain as a means of measuring larger constructs, i.e., relational communication (Rogers & Farace, 1975; Parks, 1977), communicator style (Norton & Miller, 1975; Norton, 1978) and social style (Lashbrook, Knutson, Parsley & Wenberg, 1976).

In trying to develop a coding system for relational communication messages, Rogers and Farace (1975) used a three-digit code to categorize each individual statement. Through the use of these codes, all messages were broken down into a control dimension of either one-up, one-down, or one-across. A movement toward gaining control is considered one-up, yielding or accepting control is one-down, while neutralizing control is one-across.

Ellis (1977) and Fisher and Beach (1977) have proposed similar coding schemes composed of five categories: dominance (↑ +), defined as intense attempts at relational dominance; structuring (↑ -), operationalized as attempts to influence or provide structure in a relationship; equivalence (→),

was defined as interactions that did not attempt to control nor acquiesce to another; deference (↓ -), operationalized as a willingness to follow another while retaining some choice of relational options; and submissiveness (↓ +), was defined as a willingness to relinquish control in the relationship. These behavioral labels are performed by placing sequences of behaviors into appropriate categories. On the basis of a specific category, one can make predictions about another's likely response to a communicative act and the overall communication pattern of a dyad.

The control dimension has also been measured within the communicator style construct. A dominant communicator style was originally operationalized as ten items measured by a seven point scale ranging from "very strong agreement" to "very strong disagreement". A second study tested the use of a smaller five item instrument that used a four point scale. The internal reliability for the dominant variable, using the shorter form of the instrument was considered good (.82). Norton (1978) via a stepwise regression analysis, found that the independent variable dominant accounted for 34% of the variance. Of significance was that contentious, which had previously clustered closely with its dominant style, did not make it into the regression analyses. This may suggest that the dominant communicator style best represents the directive communicative activity, that was mentioned previously. However, once again control has been relegated to second class status and not investigated for its own sake. Conceptualizations within the literature have indicated both verbal and nonverbal correlates of control, however, present instruments have not even attempted to measure the nonverbal aspects. Previous research has viewed control as a variable affecting relationships. Future research should focus on control as a variate comprised of multiple factors (i.e. the affect and anxiety dimensions may be viewed as subsets of control). This orientation

could provide a more accurate representation of behaviors within interpersonal relationships.

RATIONALE

The fundamental issue at stake in most of the coding schemes concerns the use of objective behavioral data as the indicant of control in the relationship. In most of the research (Mark, 1971; Ericson & Rogers, 1973; Rogers & Farace, 1975; Fisher, 1976; Ellis, 1976), observable acts of message elements are assigned to dominant, submissive, or netural categories on an intuitive basis by objective raters. If one takes into account Watzlavick, Beavin, and Jackson's (1967) distinction between the content and relational aspects of communication, then it is obvious that some relational (content-free) elements in the interaction are being ignored by such schemes. In fact, Folgers and Sillars (1977) found that content-free behaviors such as floor-holding and interruptions were more highly correlated with a subjects' perception of dominence than were codes of messages content. It should be obvious that research involving coding schemes should include both content and content-free evaluations of control behaviors.

While categorizations of observable behaviors is important in determining the nature of control in the relationship, Wheeless (1976) argues in the self-disclosure literature that self reports of the participants in the relationship may be a more accurate indicant of the true nature of the relationship. This same argument can be applied to the relational communication literature. Self-report perceptions may be used in conjunction with observable behaviors for an overall evaluation of the impact of control in a relationship. Therefore, this paper maintains that items tapping the construct of relational control should be generated and factor analyzed to determine the dimensionality of the construct.

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